

WASHINGTON D.C. (Today) – Rep. Michael Honda (CA-15) – a former teacher, principal and school board member – re-introduced legislation in Congress to overhaul the country’s education system and finally address the disparities in America’s schools. Rep. Honda’s Educational Opportunity and Equity Commission Act, which has broad support, including the National Education Association, Parent Teacher Association, American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, and Public Education Network, attends to the President’s concern regarding, in Obama’s words, the “relative decline of American education,” which is “untenable for our economy, unsustainable for our democracy, and unacceptable for our children.”

In support of Rep. Honda’s legislation, National Education Association President Dennis Van Roekel said, “Eliminating educational disparities is fundamental to ensuring all students have access to a great public school. The opportunity and ability of students to succeed in the 21st century should not depend on where they live. Rather, eliminating the inequitable distribution of resources in our schools is critical for students to achieve their maximum academic potential. We applaud Rep. Honda for demonstrating his commitment to educational equity and thank him for reintroducing the Educational Opportunity and Equity Commission Act.”

The Parent Teacher Association President Jan Harp Domene lauded the Congressman’s efforts on educational equity saying, “We greatly appreciate your pioneering legislation that would help build an informed, citizen-led discourse across the country on identifying solutions to instill equity in our nation’s schools.” And from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education President Sharon Robinson, “The Commission would provide valuable feedback to Congress and the community,” adding that “holding hearings and community meetings will enable individual citizens to participate in the reauthorization process in a way that hasn’t been realized yet”.

Rep. Honda commented on the bill, noting, “Despite our best efforts, our children are not receiving an equitable education. There are vast disparities between the education provided by schools in different school districts, counties and states. Our current funding formulas are outdated, relying on factors such as average daily attendance, average costs for “regular” students, percentage of low-income students and concentrations of low-income students, special education students and English language learners. Funding formulas are based on a number of factors not necessarily correlated to the individual needs of the children in the school, and they vary from state to state.”

“This is a national problem demanding a national conversation,” Rep. Honda continued. “If fostered effectively, the dialogue will have a direct and positive impact on our nation’s economy and capacity to lead in the 21st century. I’m also pleased to have Rep. Chaka Fatah partner with me in calling for this national dialogue.”

The Educational Opportunity and Equity Commission Act creates a national commission charged with gathering public opinions and insights about how government can improve education and eliminate disparities in the education system. Importantly, the Commission's composition would change the nature of the debate. Comprised of parents, teachers and experts on equity, civil rights, education policy, school finance, economics, and taxation — not merely state and federal legislators — the reform road map would be written by all users and beneficiaries of America's education system.